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ABSTRACT

This study examined the process used to accomplish multicampus change and coordination at a large state university and compared the components of the change process to a model to determine if there was a need to modify either the university change process, the model, or both. Data on organizational change were collected through in-depth interviews and observations and compared to the Fullan (1982, 1990) model of educational change, which identifies six essential themes that must be confronted in order for change to succeed. They are: (1) vision-building and leadership; (2) initiative-taking and empowerment; (3) evolutionary planning; (4) monitoring and problem-coping; (5) restructuring; and (6) staff development and resource assistance. The study found that applying a change model offers an opportunity to increase the odds of success in a way that is both practical and within reach. (Contains 23 references.) (MDM)

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Navigating Change: Improving the Process for Multicampus Higher Education

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Navigating Change: Improving the Process

Faced with an era of shrinking resources, higher education administrators have been struggling to accomplish more with less for several years now by adopting business management tools, such as strategic planning and Total Quality Management ("Community," 1993; "Most," 1993; "Inequities," 1992; Tan, 1990). But research shows that, to be effective, these strategies must be incorporated into a complete planned change process, reaching from initiation through institutionalization of the desired change in policy, technology, or academic programs (Fullan, 1982, 1990).

To more consistently succeed at planned change, then, higher education administrators need a complete, systematic model to guide the process. Using such a model, higher education institutions could consciously examine and revise their change processes, filling in gaps and eliminating bottlenecks that dilute organizational energy and resources. With this goal in mind, we recently studied branch-campus coordination at a multicampus institution, which we will call "Sunbelt University" (SBU).

Sunbelt University is a single multicampus, public research university in the Southwest. Under the typology designed by Alpert (1985), SBU is comprised of a base campus and four branches, providing two-year technical education, two-year community college education, upper-division and graduate education, and graduate professional education.

SBU is also a land-grant college, meeting all criteria for a Division I Research University, as defined by the Carnegie Classification. Sunbelt University offers 85 bachelor's degree programs, 66 master's degree programs, 46 doctoral degree programs, and 5 specialist degrees. The university offers many of these degrees to the 18,500 students enrolled on the base campus. Some degree programs - such as upper-division courses in public administration, or associate/technical degrees, or a medical degree - may be pursued or completed at specialized branch campuses, which include:

1. two campuses in a metropolitan area - one providing graduate professional education to 300 medical students (Medical Branch) and a separate campus providing upper-division, undergraduate coursework and graduate-level coursework, primarily in education and engineering fields, to 825 students as part of a four-college consortium (Senior Branch);

2. A small town campus (2,300 students), located 95 miles southeast of the flagship campus, which provides two-year technical education in such specialized areas as engineering graphics and electronic technology (Technical Branch); and

3. A metropolitan campus (4,300 students), located 65 miles southwest of the main campus, which offers traditional community college education and technical engineering courses (Juco Branch).

Student enrollment across the system's four branch campuses and its base campus totals roughly 26,400. Eighty-nine percent of the undergraduates are in-state students; 7 percent come from other states and 4 percent from more than 90 foreign countries. Women comprise 46 percent of the undergraduate population, while men account for slightly more, 54 percent. Minorities comprise 11 percent of the undergraduate student body.

At the graduate level, a total of 4,422 students are enrolled; 57 percent are men, 43 percent women; 62 percent are in-state residents; 13 percent come from other states; 25 percent from foreign countries; 8 percent are minority students. From these figures emerges a composite picture of a university that is primarily engaged in educating undergraduate students, a majority of whom are native to the state in equal numbers male and female.

Summary of the Study

This study examined the process used to accomplish multicampus change at SBU. The components of the change process that emerged were then compared to a model to determine if there was a need to modify either the SBU change process, the model, or both.

Methodology

Data was collected by a variety of methods: in-depth individual interviews of each of the highest-ranking branch-campus administrators participating in multicampus coordination (Briggs, 1986; Herriott & Firestone, 1983; McCracken, 1988; Stainback & Stainback, 1988), a group interview of the provosts (Kirk & Miller, 1986; McCracken, 1988; Spradley, 1979; Wolcott, 1988), and clinical observation (Goldhammar, 1969; Spradley, 1980) of provost interactions during coordination meetings. Inconsistencies in interview data that remained following the group interview were cross-checked (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) with data from the minutes of meetings of the SBU board of regents and a telephone interview with the SBU president.

The Change Process at SBU

From interview and observation data, a picture of multicampus coordination emerged.that showed a process relatively new and still evolving. To summarize, SBU coordination had only begun about a year prior to the study, triggered by the arrival of a new president. Previously, each campus had operated virtually autonomously and, despite the desire of the branch-campus administrators for coordination to improve economic and academic efficiency, no earlier central administration had attempted to weld the satellite campuses into a true multicampus system. The new president, however, initiated a series of small but significant changes that created a climate friendly to multicampus coordination. These changes included 1)re-naming the branch campuses to reflect a multicampus system rather than separate entities; 2) re-titling the branch-campus CEOs as "provost" of the branch; and 3) creating a new position of "multicampus provost" on the base campus to work directly with the branch-campus provosts in planning and implementing systemwide changes in academics, policies, and technology.

Soon after the provosts began meeting regularly as a group, a crisis arose that required the newly formed council of provosts to quickly improvise a process to coordinate a systemwide change mandated by the state higher education coordinating board.

Even before that change was completed, however, a second crisis loomed. The situation was this: For years, the policy and procedures manuals used by the SBU branch campuses had grown increasingly complex, outdated, and unintelligible, culminating in a five-volume tome that generally gathered dust on the shelf. Staff and faculty had made regular, annual calls for revision of the manuals; and a crisis again precipitated action when one provost almost lost his job due to his controversial interpretation of the maze of policies. As a result of this incident, the provosts decided to coordinate systematic revision of each branch-campus policy manual, integrating and clarifying the policies of the state, the base campus, and the branch campuses. Our study roughly coincided with this period of the provosts' activity. As our research study wound down, the provosts also began to plan a third cooperative project to implement a major technological change across all campuses in the university system.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used was the Fullan Model (1982, 1990), which identifies six essential themes that research has demonstrated must be confronted and dealt with in order for change to succeed in educational organizations. These six essentials are: vision-building and leadership, initiative-taking and empowerment, evolutionary planning, monitoring/problem-coping, restructuring, and staff development/resource assistance. Building on this framework, Fullan (1982, 1990) created a virtual handbook to guide the change process in education organizations by focusing on two highly practical elements:

1. crucial factors determining success or failure, and
2. flexible techniques to use in each stage of the process.

This model continues the tradition of synthesizing organizational theory and research conducted in higher and common education, business, and public administration that has resulted in a variety of rational planning, problem-solving, social interaction and political models of change (Nordvall, 1982). Of particular interest to higher education, the Fullan Model (1982, 1990) also

acknowledges the complexity of the change process, the necessity for shared authority, and the inevitability of conflict and negotiation in accomplishing effective change (Creamer & Creamer, 1988; Millin & Phelan, 1988), factoring all these elements into the Model's design. As a result, the Model appears to be a particularly appropriate lens through which to examine coordination of planned change in higher education and/or multicampus institutions.

Additionally, the Fullan Model (1982, 1990) was selected as the basis for comparison with the provosts' improvised change process because it incorporates research findings from more than 500 studies of organization theory in business, sociology, and education, distilling these findings into a theory of successful change that stems from an interactive, three-phase process:

1. initiation and adoption (an idea is suggested and a decision made to change),
2. implementation (the idea is put into practice), and
3. institutionalization/rejection (the idea either becomes routine or practice eventually reverts to a former method).

Successful navigation of each phase requires completion of specific tasks. Although the tasks and phases may not be completed in linear fashion, each must be completed at some point in order for change to succeed.

The initiation or adoption phase requires:

1. relevance (the idea is perceived by the organization to be practical, needed, and clear),
2. readiness (the organization recognizes that it has the capacity and the need for the change), and
3. resources (human and financial support for the change are available).

Phase two, implementation, requires six tasks:

1. vision-building (synthesis and articulation of a widely shared view of the system);

2. evolutionary planning (adaptation to fit on-site conditions, blending top-down initiative and bottom-up innovation);
3. power sharing (establishment of cross-hierarchical steering groups, a collaborative work culture, delegation of authority);
4. resources/staff development (continuous interaction, support services, and training during implementation;
5. monitoring/problem-coping (observation and measurement of what is most important; use of deep problem-solving methods--redesign, creating new roles, more assistance--to improve results; and
6. restructuring (changes in roles, finance, formal policies to create working conditions to facilitate implementation).

Finally, Fullan (1982, 1990) points out two factors necessary for the third phase, successful institutionalization of change:

1. resources (including a budget for continuing support services and orientation/in-service training for newcomers), and
2. central administration leadership (including early, active, and consistent support for retention of changes implemented).

While Fullan's Model (1982, 1990) was not specifically developed for higher education, it continues a lengthy tradition of synthesizing and adapting principles of planned organizational change into flexible guidelines useful in a wide variety of educational settings and it is the most complete model developed for education organizations (Wright, 1994). Therefore, it was deemed the best available model for the study.

Analyzing the Change Process

Inductive analysis (Akinbode & Clark, 1976; Miles & Huberman, 1984) of the data summarized above revealed a two-pronged process for accomplishing systemwide change at SBU, one used by the provosts and the other used on the individual campuses.

The provosts' process. The process used by the provosts to accomplish systemwide change, like coordination itself at SBU, was still new when the study began. Still, a clear pattern was evident:

1. an external trigger event occurred, which was
2. perceived as threatening; after which,
3. the provosts reacted by coordinating a systemwide response to the threat, setting guidelines for each campus in making the change; after which,
4. each campus developed its own portion of the response, dovetailed to fit the systemwide guidelines for the change; after which,
5. the monthly coordination meetings were used to mark progress on each campus and/or work out problems encountered in making the change; after which,
6. the coordinated change took effect, neutralizing the threat (See Figure 1).

The on-campus change process. In addition to the provosts' process of coordinating systemwide change, each individual campus had a local process for accomplishing desired change. The internal change process differed at each branch, but the bottom line was that none of the branches employed a theory-based, consciously designed process to accomplish change. Moreover, the same gaps in the change process were visible in both the individual campus change process and the multicampus process: Whether on-campus or across the branch-campus system, data analysis revealed two gaps in planning and implementing change, which accounted for most difficulties.

Perception gaps. Some problems occurred because needs perceived by internal and external constituencies, such as students, frontline employees, the legislature and/or board of regents were not perceived as significant by the central administration. We named this type of blind spot a "perception gap." Perception gaps in the change process can have far-reaching consequences, sabotaging change ordered by an administration or, as in this study, triggering crisis management when changes strongly desired by internal/external constituencies are postponed too long by administrators. No mechanism--such as environmental scanning--was in place at SBU to determine rising pressure points among administrative constituencies, and the effect was

much the same as using emergency room treatment as a family's only source of health care.

Information gaps. The second gap diluting effective administration stemmed from what we term "information gaps." Again, these gaps can create serious problems for university administrators. Frequently, employees do not know all the steps in an effective change process or all the questions that need to be answered to succeed. For this reason, diffusing a systematic change process throughout an institution can make a great impact; it gives people the tools they need to make change proceed more successfully. But no systematic change process was in regular use at SBU, which virtually assured recurrent problems in implementing major changes across the system.

Results of the Comparison

Once the steps in the change process used by the provosts had been identified (See Figure 1), the pattern could be compared to the components of a change model. In comparison to the Fullan Model (1982, 1990), the SBU multicampus change process was found to lack active development of several elements. However, a stronger process appeared to be emerging as the provosts gained experience at coordination.

The weak spots in each stage (initiation, implementation, and institutionalization) of the SBU coordination process are summarized in Table 1 and fully described below:

Initiation. Initiation was the most limited of the three phases of the change process used by the branch-campus provosts (See Table 1). External pressures, rather than provosts, had determined the focus of coordinated change in both instances. And although the capacity to accomplish these changes, as well as the need for both changes, had been identified much earlier, the provosts did not respond until the need for change was made directly relevant to them. As a result, the initiation phase was reactive rather than actively developed in both instances. On the other hand, the provosts actively selected their third coordination project and were planning

to pool resources to initiate this change as the study ended, suggesting a more active initiation phase might be emerging.

Implementation. All phases of implementation showed some evidence of active development in the branch-campus change process (See Table 1). First, restructuring to permit regular provosts' meetings encouraged at least two other components necessary for an active process of successful change implementation: monitoring/problem coping and evolutionary planning. Power sharing and vision-building were also actively incorporated in the branch-campus change process, while active incorporation of human and financial resources to encourage successful implementation was emerging in the change process.

Institutionalization. One of the two components necessary to institutionalize change was active in SBU coordination, since leadership was exercised by the Multicampus Provost in scheduling and conducting provosts' meetings (See Table 1). He also provided practical assistance to the other provosts to facilitate progress, upon request.

In contrast, however, the study found no evidence of active planning for the second component necessary to institutionalize change, a continuing budget and staff development to diffuse an effective change process, either vertically or horizontally, throughout the system.

Recommendations

The findings of this study led to several recommendations for the SBU provosts. Among these was a recommendation that they begin using a change model to in planning multicampus change projects. Another recommendation was that the provosts allocate adequate resources to diffuse a step-by-step change process throughout the organization, vertically and horizontally, to reduce both perception gaps and information gaps.

Implications

Use of the Fullan Model (1982, 1990) to guide the examination of higher education change processes suggested several avenues for further research.

Leadership. The role of the SBU president in initiating coordination that emerged from the study was unanticipated by the Fullan Model (1982, 1990). Thus, a gap may exist in the initiation phase of the Model (1982, 1990); leadership, or a champion, may be necessary to achieve organizational readiness, just as a champion is recognized by the Model (1982, 1990) as necessary to institutionalize change. Additional research is needed to confirm or disconfirm leadership as a component in the successful initiation of higher education change.

External pressure. A second possible avenue of research stems from the fact that the SBU provosts repeatedly failed to respond to rising pressure points; they had to experience a sense of personal threat before addressing changes that had long been relevant to their organization and/or governing board. Is personal relevance always required before top decisionmakers initiate change? Or can higher education decisionmakers learn to effectively scan the environment, identify rising pressure points, and address them before a crisis occurs? There is a need for additional research to determine if the influence of external pressure in initiating higher education change may be inadequately recognized by the Model (1982, 1990).

Augmenting the model. Another implication of the study is that a need exists for a more action-oriented model depicting components of a successful planned change process for higher education. Such a model would encompass and go beyond the Fullan Model (1982, 1990), which simply reflects the steps known to occur when change succeeds, even if the steps were not consciously planned. A proposed model for higher education planned change, which utilizes the findings of this study, is depicted in Figure 2. The model uses the three phases identified by Fullan as necessary for effective change to occur--initiation, implementation, and institutionalization--but it reflects a planned approach and higher education needs, extensively revising the initiation phase, accordingly. In the higher education model, the three components required for effective initiation of planned change are: 1) organizational relevance, 2) central administration relevance, and

3) leadership. Fullan's components of readiness and resources are reduced to activities accomplished within the broader component of leadership. Fullan's third step in initiation, organizational relevance, has been augmented in the higher education model by a twin component, top-level decisionmaker relevance.

The remaining two phases of change in the Fullan Model (1982, 1990)--implementation and institutionalization--are augmented in the higher education model simply by articulating the need for active attention to each step in these two phases in order to plan change effectively.

Conclusion

Addressing higher education's need for more effective planning and a consciously designed change process would clearly serve the best interests of American higher education. In an era of shrinking resources, college administrators need to better target their limited human and financial resources to get more bang for the buck. As this study demonstrates, applying a change model offers an opportunity to increase the odds of success in a way that is both practical and within reach.

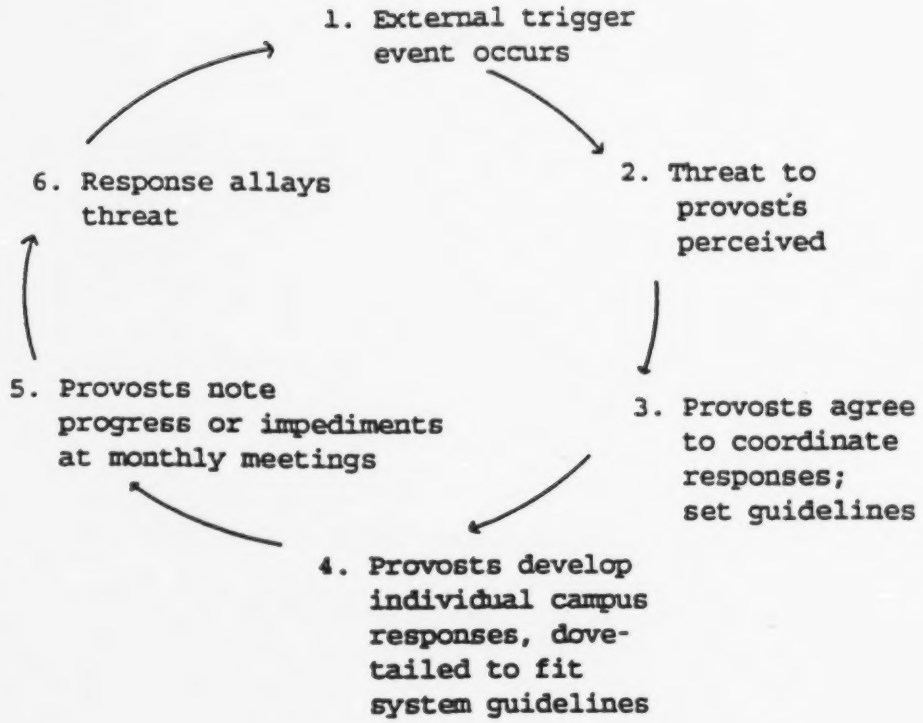
Table 1

A Comparison of Change Processes

for Sunbelt University and the Fullan Model

Change Components	Development in Fullan	Development at Sunbelt Univ.
Initiation		
*relevance	active	reactive
*readiness	active	reactive
*resources	active	emerging
Implementation		
vision bldg.	active	emerging
power sharing	active	active
*resources	active	emerging
*restructuring	active	active
*monitoring	active	active
*evolutionary planning	active	active
Institutionalization		
*continuing resources	active	reactive
*leadership	active	active

Figure 1


1. External trigger event occurs
2. Threat to provosts perceived
3. Provosts agree to coordinate responses; set guidelines
4. Provosts develop individual campus responses, dove-tailed to fit system guidelines
5. Provosts note progress or impediments at monthly meetings
6. Response allays threat

Provosts' Pattern of Initiating Change

Figure 2

Higher Education Planned Change Model

Initiation:

Successful initiation of planned change requires active attention to--

1. organizational relevance [the change should be perceived by employees as practical, needed, and clear]
2. central administration relevance [the change should be perceived by top-level decisionmakers as practical, needed, and clear]
3. leadership [development of organization readiness; active allocation of sufficient human and financial resources to accomplish the change]

Implementation:

Successful implementation of planned change requires active attention to--

1. vision building
2. power sharing
3. restructuring
4. evolutionary planning
5. resources/staff development
6. monitoring/problem-coping

Institutionalization:

Successful institutionalization of planned change requires active attention to--

1. leadership
2. resources

Figure 2. Higher Education Planned Change Model

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